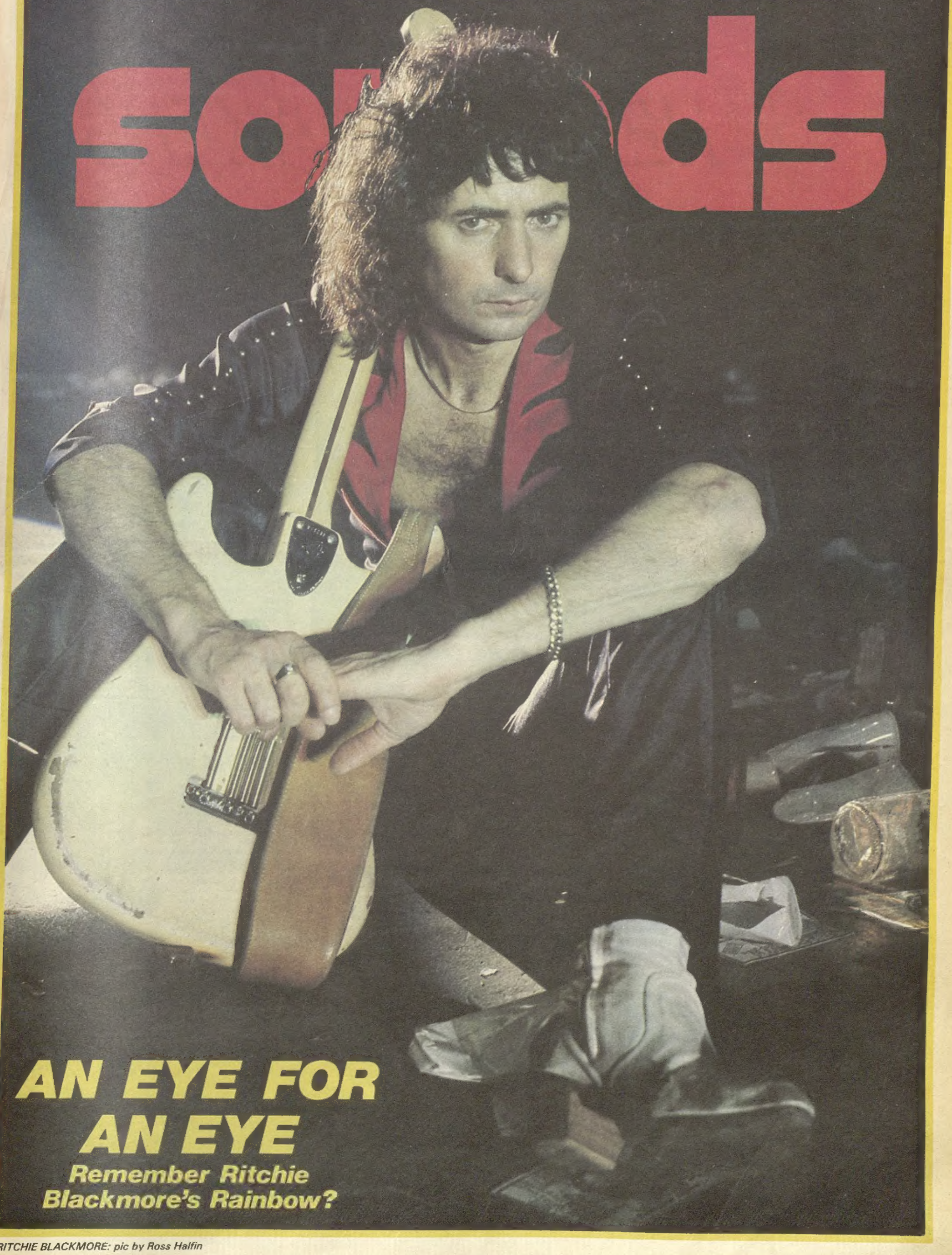
SOUNDS DECEMBER 4, 1982 35p

ENTER OUR STATUS QUO COMPETITION -AND MEET MEMBERS OF THE BAND!



AN EYE FOR AN EYE

Remember Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow?

RITCHIE BLACKMORE: pic by Ross Halfin

GARRY BUSHELL gets an eyeful of RITCHIE BLACKMORE'S RAINBOW

MOST PEOPLE reckon Ritchie Blackmore's a miserable bastard. Mean, moody, mysterious, macabre and, by implication, Mandraxed to the gills, the Blackmore of popular imigination has a heart as black as his stage clothes and all the humour of a burning orphanage.

In Rock Dream terms Blackmore would have to be painted as the murderous and gloomily glacial funeral director of Rainbow's 'Death Alley Driver' video, a Rachmannite rent collector with the conscience of a rabid rodent, or some madly morose monk twiddling thumbscrews in the torture chambers of the Spanish Inquisition.

It is, he admits himself, an image he's worked hard to create and perpetuate. But it's actually as close to the real man as Sun reporting is to the facts.

Think about it, would the sulky saturnine swine of media mythology really have posed for Sounds sporting stockings and suspenders?

Would a bona-fide scowling Puritan really have discussed the serious possibility of changing Rainbow's name to The Filth?

Astute readers will have already sussed that, like Dr Who's Tardis, there's more to Blackmore's character than meets the eye. While yours truly had gathered from the revelations of mutual pals Halfin and Makowski that it was probably more realistic to view Blackmore as the biggest wind-up since the noted black revolutionary Tim X invented the wrist watch.

Recoil in disgust, droogs, at the jolly jape played on an unfortunate Kerrang! journalist, fitted up by Blackmore with a beautiful transvestite whose additional organs weren't discovered till the, ahem, moment of truth.

Shiver at the story of the Sounds hackette who found herself hand-cuffed to a hotel bar with a lock of her own hair mysteriously in Blackmore's possession for who knows what wicked act.

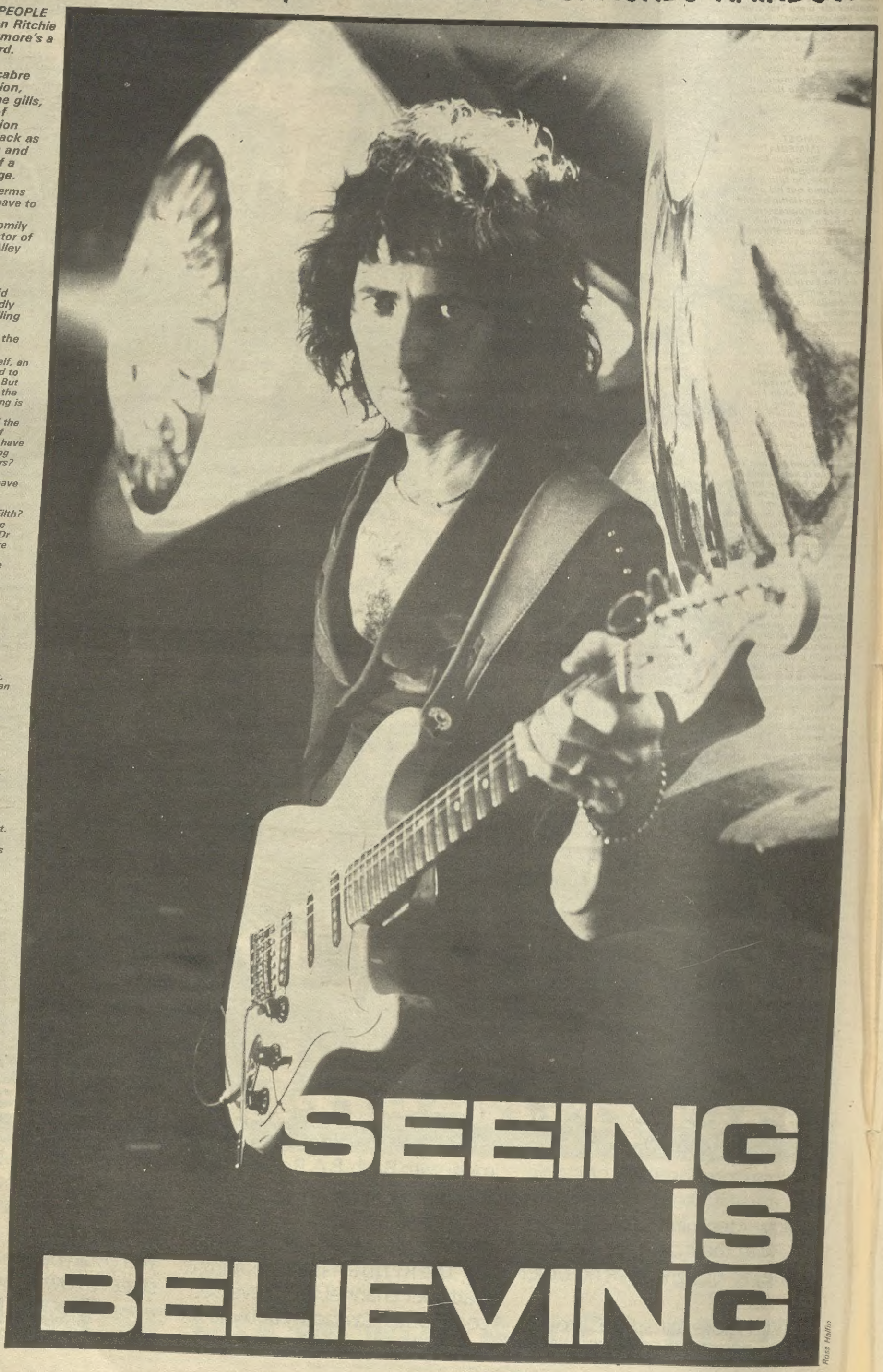
Imagine the horror that struck guests at Blackmore's New York home who, after being well plied with intoxicating liquor, were bombarded by weird apparitions emanating from electrical devices planted by the man in his back garden.

Even being a pal was no safeguard against such wicked gee-ups. The first time Halfin met Rainbow he returned to his hotel room characteristically as legless as a Boa Constrictor only to find it systematically stripped of all furniture and personal belongings.

Months later a box he was perched on in a photo pit exploded as the band came on stage sending the fat fool flying singed and stunned into the shocked audience, his battered box brownie clutched tight to his smouldering 'Gay Power' t-shirt.

Maybe Blackmore is rock's answer to Baron Frankenstein — but only if that nefarious noble was being played by Jeremy Beadle. I prefer to think of him as a hitman for the Goons, though as I got off the plane at Helsinki I was far less certain, seriously doubting the sense of this adventure.

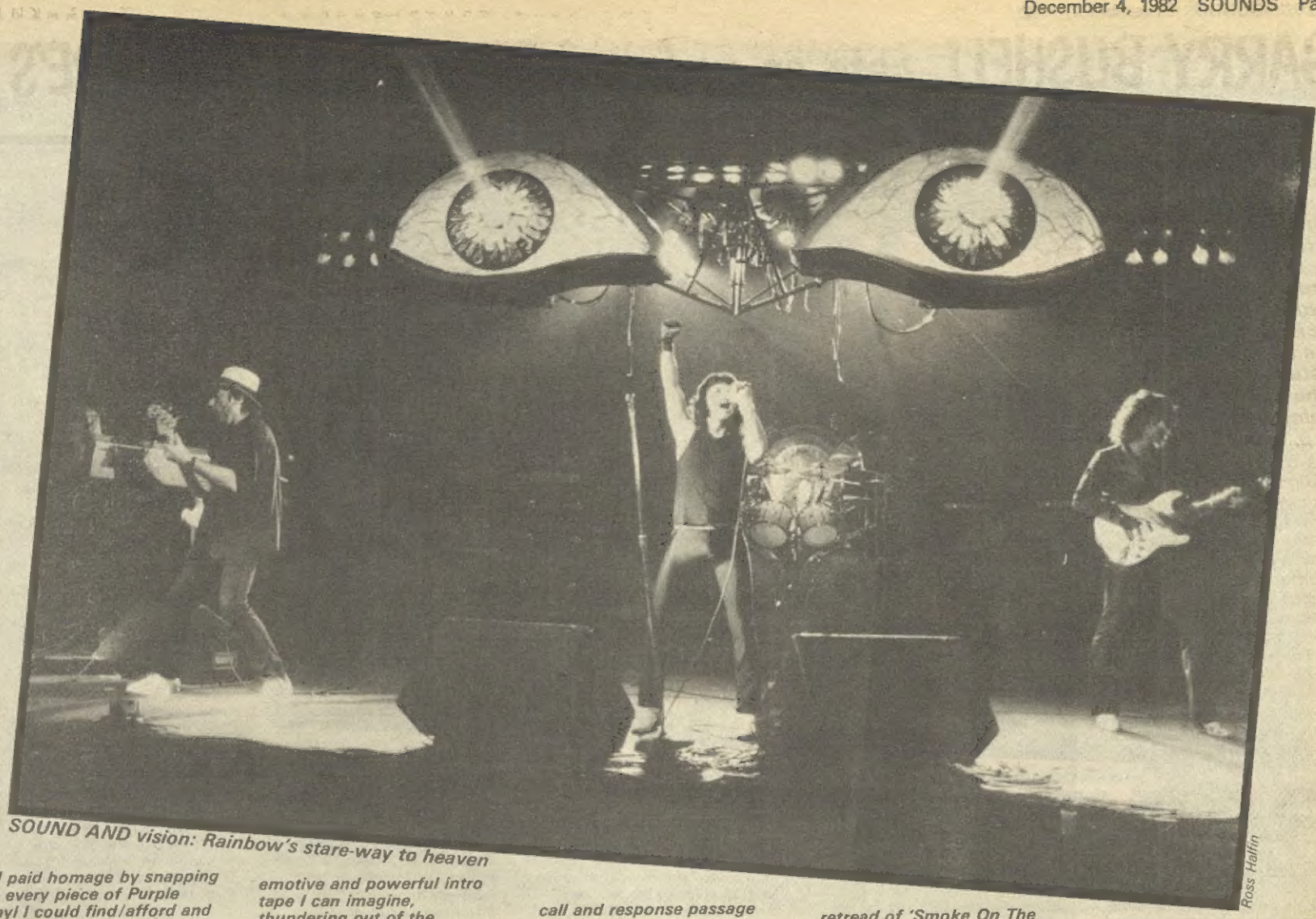
In fact I was desperately doing deals with God, trying to get an estimate on a Guardian Angel. It must have worked cos, as you've already read in Jaws, it was Halfin who got stitched up the most, ending up on the receiving end of a rampant



Ross Halfin

trans-sexual!

We were met at the airport by a Finnish record company man who asked politely whether we were "the men from Melody Maker". The wind-up had begun. Calmed only by the cool chill of the early evening air we were driven straight to the gig, itself a giant ice hockey stadium, and plunged into the lunacy of the Rainbow dressing room.



SOUND AND vision: Rainbow's stare-way to heaven

Ross Halfin

ALMOST IMMEDIATELY drummer Bobby Rondinelli, a thick set, fast-talking filth hound, has whipped out his penis and poked it into Halfin's hand.

Ross is unimpressed.

"Hahaha," Rondinelli cackles, "Ross is the only bloke I know you can't gross out! C'mon let's see yer warts, jee-zus, they must work like a French Tickler."

As the burly Brooklynite and the wimpy Wimbledonite are lost in perverse peaks of mutual appreciation, handsome Rainbow singer Joe Lynn Turner grabs my hand for shaking and promises me "Two dumb days and two numb nights". I'm still reeling at the possible implications when I get a summons to meet Ritchie.

Blackmore has a separate dressing room from the band and the two girl singers, which emphasises both the 'lone wolf' side to his character and the fact that Rainbow is very much his baby, the band he formed back in 1975 after walking out on Purple and has steered through what once seemed an endless stream of line-up changes to the permanent and arguably the finest rock'n'roll call of today — all in pursuit of his own highly individual vision of what he wants to achieve with his music.

Meeting Blackmore was a big event for me, and not only because of the challenge of emerging from the conflab unscathed. Y'see, in common with millions of other kids, Blackmore was largely instrumental in shaping my taste and my teenage back in those grease and great coat days.

It was watching Purple live on telly that gave me the first clue that there might possibly be more to music than Bob And Marcia and Desmond Dekker. 'Black Night' and 'Paranoid' on *TOTPs* soon after completed the process of sartori which was shortly fully justified when I acquired that timeless classic metal album 'Deep Purple In Rock'.

I paid homage by snapping up every piece of Purple vinyl I could find/afford and filling in Ritchie's name under 'Best Guitarist' on every pop opinion poll I came across. He was as great a hero to me in my (musically) formative years as Hendrix/Lennon/Jagger/Hunter/Holder/Stewart/Ozzy/Marriott/Bowie et al.

And it's very hard to put that into words without sounding phoney so in the end I didn't say any of it, letting Halfin do most of the talking (or, more exactly, drag up a cesspit of slanderous gossip) while Ritchie went through his near-religious pre-gig rituals — clipping his nails with a pair of pliers, drinking a limited amount of scotch (about four doubles) and loosening up with finger exercises on a cream Fender Strat, unleashing several stunning runs even in warm-up.

If I had any fears that his prowess had diminished with the years these put paid to them, and the gig of course.

'Land Of Hope And Glory' makes for possibly the most emotive and powerful intro tape I can imagine, thundering out of the darkness before Judy Garland's disembodied voice announces "We must be. . . over the rainbow" and Blackmore's guitar oozes syrup into the heavy riff of 'Spotlight Kid', smoke bombs and sparklers joining the fast-forward rhythm as giant mechanical eye balls descend from the heavens beaming surrealistically into the bowels of the quilt-coated crowd.

That other prime Purple protagonist Roger Glover supplies bass lines in his silly hat which just leaves newest boy David Rosenthal, a classically trained organist, to complete the line-up. They're an impressive unit and though I must admit the obligatory ballad left me cold my worst fears of an onstage pop bland-out were completely unrealised.

Rainbow's massive juke box hits are magnificently heavy live. Indeed the only bore of the evening was Dave's over-long organ solo — he's definitely at his best on the *Close Encounters* style call and response passage with Blackmore, at the opening of 'Power'.

Blackmore himself sparkles most brightly on the blues intro to 'Can't Happen Here' or the 'Lazy F' passage before 'All Night Long' with his guitar teasing and flirting like an LA street walker or swooping and attacking like a venom-crazed pterodactyl.

But for my money the finest moment comes with their droog-approved reappraisal of Ludwig Van's 'Ode To Joy' which precedes the more populist set-closer 'Long Live Rock'n'Roll'.

The crowd bay desperately for more like a horde of hardened beer tasters facing a brewery strike and before long Blackmore's guitar rings out a beautiful melody from the darkness joined one by one by the other instruments until the guitar transmutes into the spine-tingling opening chords of 'Since you've Been Gone', cut short after the first chorus for a more nostalgic retread of 'Smoke On The Water', a fearsome finale to a fine show.

BACKSTAGE JOE LYNN helpfully suggests some lines for my review.

"Put 'the singer sucked again'," he smiles, "and make sure you mention the 'Ian Gillan screams'."

In Blackmore's room I find the guitarist has been joined by about 16 female autograph hunters.

"Any of these lumps y'fancy just tap 'em on the shoulder," Ritchie says generously.

Lumps? Oh, I see. Realising the full Millar-nixingly sexist implications of the remark I explain that being married like him I have no interest in other women, honest, and reflect that such rude road terminology gives whole new meanings to such hitherto innocent phrases as 'one lump or two' or 'like it or lump it.'

Back in the hotel bar, a somewhat more intoxicated Blackmore reveals his early teen promise as a javelin thrower at White City and asks thankfully non-English speaking 'lumps' such pertinent questions as whether they'd "Ever had a javelin up the arse?"

But it's Dave Rosenthal and Scandanavian tour promoter Eric Thomsen who suffer most from the Rainbow wind-up tonight.

Dave, it appears, shares Halfin's religion and the caricature traits of it, i.e. he's tight as a Big Daddy headlock. So when he was offered the chance to mix support band Girlschool's sound for a fiver a night he jumped at it, even though if it'd been true it would have lost the real mixing man his job. Thus it's relatively easy for Blackmore to convince the post-gig boozers that the reason Dave's not there with them is because he's driving the Girlschool bus to Stockholm ferry for 20 dollars!

Eric Thomsen suffers more. A tall, bespectacled dip-stick of a man, he's been strung up naked by the band before but doesn't seem to mind. Tonight he announces his intention of performing his party piece — drinking a glass of coke while standing on his head. Naturally Ritchie has the coke laced with salt — you could hear the screams for miles around.

But even this didn't spell the end of Eric's torment. RB had got hold of his passport and superglued a picture of a skeleton over his face. He had to clear Swedish Customs after I'd returned home. For all I know he could be languishing in a Swedish jail to this very day.

Ross Halfin

RAINBOW MK. 694 (from left): Ritchie Blackmore, Bobby Rondinelli, Roger Glover, David Rosenthal and (seated) Joe Lynn Turner

SOMETIME AND somehow the next evening we've arrived at Copenhagen for a night off. We're booked into an old and prestigious hotel called the Kong Frederick (after a royal gorilla perhaps) rather than its more customary modern rival, mostly because Ritchie once had a blazing row with the hotel manager there. Seems Ritchie'd kept getting woken up at Godforsaken hours of the morning when the band were last recording in Denmark. When protests made no difference, Blackmore moved amps back from the studio and showed 'em how to really make a row!

Continues over

Ross Halfin

RAINBOW

from page 27

So in place of saunas and jacuzzis we get atmosphere! history! wood, rafters, suits of armour, portraits of chinless royalty, horse brasses. . . an olde worlde pub feel with nouveau riche prices. And the rooms reek of ancient institutions too — like Dartmoor Prison.

"No TV," Bobby Rondinelli moans. "And the rooms're so small. All I wanna do is jerk-off and go to sleep. In here I'd hit the ceiling and it'd drip on my head all night."

Later that evening Ritchie takes me and Ross, his side-kick Barry Ambrose and Dave Rosenthal, out for a beer and a chat in an, in retrospect, amazingly straight disco. Blackmore sports a suitably arrogant badge announcing 'Everyone has the right to my opinion' and eventually we sit aside and begin with the here and now.

"At the moment I'm going through a phase of self-evaluation," Ritchie reveals. "So I've been putting off recording plans. There's supposed to be a new album in April but we won't be doing it until we've got the ideas. I think in a sense we've lost direction, but at the same time I was quite pleased with the last two albums' melodic vein.

"I'd like the next one to be as good, if not better, but after you've done 20 albums it gets much harder to constantly improve."

What do you rate as the best album you've ever been involved in?

"I never listen to my own stuff. I was in a record shop the other day and I heard an old Purple album — it was a really weird feeling. . . At the moment I'm lacking a lot of motivation. I practice a lot and I still love to play guitar but I'm not sure where I want to be, whether it's in the Foreigner field or hard rock, it varies from day to day.

"Y'see I'm losing interest in heavy rock just for the sake of it — I refuse to play heavy just for the sake of it like, say, AC/DC do. There has to be some sort of subtlety as well. There's no one I look towards for inspiration now. I'm bored with looking towards Hendrix. I find myself listening to Tull, though obviously that's not a direction Rainbow will go in, and Abba. I love Abba's heavy classical progressions, they're brilliant writers.

"I respect Jeff Beck, he was probably the best rock'n'roll guitarist in the Yardbirds days — but he wants to get away from rock'n'roll now."

Did you ever hear Randy Rhoads?

"Randy was very good, slightly cliched but very good. And I like Eddie Van Halen too, he's very impressive though sometimes he lacks satisfaction."

Blackmore is a surprisingly soft-spoken man, but he radiates a rare intensity, a charisma if you like. He takes the whole interview/press process as seriously as he does his own music, granting only one interview a year for quality control and playing it really straight.

At one stage, somewhat jocularly, I asked him what he thought of a disco ditty in the background. At first he didn't answer, I assumed he thought it beneath contempt, but when the record had finished he gave a full, fair appraisal. Mind you, he might have been geeing me up. . .

Have you much new material written?

"No. When I'm on the road I tend to become a bit of a zombie, I'm only creative at home, and I'll be at home all December so hopefully by January there'll be some good material. But I refuse to just go in the studio and bang something out to satisfy the record company's plans.

"When I left Purple one of the biggest things I wanted in my new deal was a maximum of one album a year. In Purple they wanted us to do three a year — that's why every other one was sub-standard."

Do you ever regret leaving Purple?

"Not at all. I'm very pleased I left when I did, it was great to go then because the band had started to go on the slide. David and the rest had started going very souly. I wanted a rock'n'roll band, not a funky soul band."

Would you ever consider a Purple reunion?

"Yeah, I might do that. In fact we might be talking about it in the near future. But it'd have to be done for the right reasons. A lot of people I talk to would like to see the band again, but we wouldn't be recording live triple albums or anything like that. I don't believe in doing it just for the money. I'd do it with the right line-up, Roger, Ian, Jon and Gillan. And if it worked out we might do a creative studio album. It'd be fun, but I wouldn't like it to interfere with Rainbow."

VERY FEW of today's rock guitarists try and do anything different at all, they're content to work within a formula, which is why the giants of the late Sixties are still pretty much unequalled. Like Hendrix, Blackmore was more than a virtuoso, he created a style, although unlike Hendrix Blackmore's vision/direction has concentrated on the assimilation of classical ideas into the rock format.

"That's what I try to do, use classical scales and progressions. My guitar parts are usually similar to classical violin parts — I don't copy them but I am influenced by them. I like listening to the scales they use.

"Having played for 26 years I don't get much enjoyment out of listening to rock'n'roll any more."

The Bach and Beethoven influences are obvious, I would have thought Wagner would have been a natural.

"No — he's too heavy. I'm more into the Baroque people and Handel. I like some of the Renaissance music, and medieval music. I think a lot of 16th Century music could be used in rock'n'roll, it's very similar in many ways.

"Mostly I listen to organ recitals, especially in churches. They have a majestic quality that can root me to the spot, whereas with rock'n'roll I often feel 'what's the point?' Church music makes me feel proud to be part of music. I tend to steer clear of rock'n'roll and r'n'r people in general, I find I've got nothing in common with them."

I recall the 1970 concert Purple did with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

"It did the trick, I think it had a certain novelty value. Jon Lord did a good job with it — it felt very odd to be conducted. I think I'd enjoy it a lot more now."

Well, why not do it with 'Stargazer'?

"Maybe. It'd have to be miked properly and we'd have to use electric violins, so it'd have to be open-minded musicians and we'd have to have them in for several numbers. Yeah, we'll do it one day.

"I don't have much ambition, I never have had, I'm just kinda happy just playing guitar. Though I do miss the simplicity of ten years ago. Then if a record was good, it was good. Now people are too keen to jump on trends just because they're new with no regard for their musical worth."

How far are you prepared to compromise your ideals for America?

"We've Americanised to a certain extent, the last album was a lot glossier, but I wouldn't like to lose our fans in England. I think there's probably a limit to how well we can do in America because we've got a very European sound, and to make it in America you've got to have a country or a blues base. I think Queen are the only band who haven't had that and done really well there. . .

"I don't know how people survive in England any more," he says, going off on a tangent. "I think it's because basically we're a very stubborn people. It's like living in trenches!

"The Customs people are the worst, they sort of resent you for having got out the country! It's one thing to come down on drugs, but I hate the way they come down on people who've been to Spain and are bringing in an extra bottle of wine or something. It's disgusting, I feel really strongly about that. And I hate the way people are always eager to run England down."

What about Thatcher?

"I think she's doing a good job," Ritchie replies — but I'm sure I can detect a wind-up sparkle in his eyes and decide to call his bluff. A lot of people see you exactly like the 'Death Alley Driver' video.

Blackmore grins. "That was very tongue in cheek. People don't realise that things like that just aren't that serious. But I did work hard on the bastard image for some time, I think I well and truly have that image now. . . "

And the Blackmore grin grows broader and turns into a laugh.

NEEDLESS TO say that is just the tip of the iceberg. I'd need a book, or at the very least a Fan Library, to do Rainbow/Blackmore any sort of justice.

And indeed some of the best stuff came just chatting in his dressing room (where he talked about old castles, the paranormal, Matthew Manning and, perhaps more intriguingly, about the possibility of recording a blues album with a mobile in London next year); at Copenhagen airport (where the man produced about 20 different vitamin bottles and gave me a lecture on their properties); or indeed just driving to and from the gig (when he revealed some intriguing historical details — did you know his first band was the Two Eyes Coffee Bar Junior Skiffle Group; or that back in '63 he was in a band called the Outlaws with Chas Hodges? So naturally he supports the campaign to get Chas and Dave in Sounds. . .)

Saddest of the lot, I never got any of what Halfin called "really perverted smut" from Bobby either, though believe me after a stroll up Copenhagen's famous walking street with the pair of them I'm convinced none of it would have been printable anyway.

The most moderate revelation of this shopping expedition (which was turned, against my will natch, into a 'lump hunt' with stolen passes for arrows) was Bob's plans to write a book on love and women.

"If they're nice to you, they love you," Bob explained. "If they're not nice to you they love you even more. Never accept no for an answer, it's right there in Chapter Four." Later he gave me an 'Anal Sex' book to illustrate the point! There was certainly something rotten in the state of Denmark that day, but it was definitely imported.

You may be thinking I got out of this remarkably lightly, but in reality only years of hard drinking saved me from a fate worse than death. After the Copenhagen gig Blackmore announced he was going to take us all out on the town as a parting gift. He took us to a club called Madame Arthur's — and if you think the name sounds like a clue, you're dead right.

It was another gay/transvestite club full of horrible bearded bozos snogging away like nobody's business. Thankfully by refusing to leave our table or drink anything other than bottled beer opened in front of me I survived with my heterosexuality intact. Halfin was not so lucky.

"I'll have to stop drinking brandy," he said to me in the morning. "It didn't 'alf make my arse sore."

POST SCRIPT. A fortnight later over in New England with Rose Tattoo I met a girl who claimed to have been Ritchie's baby sitter. Once, she said, she'd been sitting alone with him in a room when he pointed at an empty chair and said "Who's sitting there?"

"He could really see someone," the girl explained, "he's really psychic."

Maybe he is, I don't pretend to know. But somehow I reckon somewhere Blackmore, the ultimate wind-up merchant, will be sitting back and grinning at the memory.

DIFFERENT STROKES

'This Is Not Love'
THE KILLJOYS CLAY 18

Logic & Lust
LOWLIFE
CLAY 19 & 12 CLAY 19

'Leather, Bristles, No Survivors and Sick Boys'
GBH CLAY LP5

Marketed & Distributed by Pinnacle, 1 Oasthouse Way, Cray Avenue, Orpington, Kent BR5 3QJ. Telephone (0689) 27000. Telex 892008

CLAY RECORDS JP